

## AMERICAN HUSTLE

By Lorraine Viade, Psy.D.



*American Hustle* is a highly entertaining movie with characters that are larger than life in ways that seem authentic due to the talents of the actors. Christian Bale proves that there is nothing anyone can do to him to diminish his sex appeal. The story is a con within a con and the game is played so well by these characters who offer a wide spectrum of hilarious dysfunction. There are personality types galore in *American Hustle*. Bradley Cooper plays an FBI agent whose stuffy arrogance is well matched by Bale as a semi-honest, semi-swindler who meets his intellectual and soul match in Amy Adams. Jeremy Renner is a winner as a politician whose ambitions make him a prime patsy for the team of hucksters.

There is a great rendition of the beautiful yet dangerous borderline personality in Jennifer Lawrence who plays the volatile wife of Bale. She is the best con of all in how she deftly manipulates situations for her own gain. This movie is one of many this year that are anchored to real-life events. I loved the “in your face” emotions of these people who were not afraid to just be who they were no matter how flawed. There is a bittersweet honesty inherent in those who are dishonest. In the end, they fool no one. These delinquents know they are conning not only others but themselves and those they love get hurt in the process. And yet they are charming, irresistible to watch and, if

nothing else, interesting to the rest of us. They do what most people (hopefully) won't do and that is good entertainment, but it will not appeal to you at all if you have ever been the target of those real-life swindlers, cheats and hustlers. No, no, no.

*American Hustle* gets to the heart of the age-old question, "Just who is the bad guy here?" Sometimes, the people who are trying to trap the criminals are not the fine, upstanding citizens we think they are. Everyone in *American Hustle* is corrupt in their own way. And so the lesson here is, if you want to play the game, you better be good at it and know exactly who you are playing with. Otherwise, you risk losing a lot more than money.

People will either love this movie or just not see the point of it all. For me, the point is the execution of the con. When it is delivered, it is flawless. The morality of a life spent taking advantage of others can be debated, but, if we view this as a cautionary tale, we can be on the lookout and keep those real crooks at bay where they belong.

I give *American Hustle* five comb-overs. Just for making bad hair sexy, *American Hustle* deserves an Oscar!

